



December 9, 2009

To: Senator Toni Harp, Representative John Geragosian, Members of the
Appropriations Committee
From: Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director, Common Cause in Connecticut
Re: Governor's Budget Deficit Mitigation Proposal

Common Cause in Connecticut urges the General Assembly to reject Governor Rell's proposed devastation of the Citizens' Election Program in her latest deficit mitigation plan. An additional cut of \$12million will gut the Program and render it effectively useless before the 2010 election. As you know, candidates for statewide office are already raising funds to support their campaigns. They need know, as soon as possible, that the CEP is secure and that funds will be available.

In the wake of tremendous scandal, thanks to the hard work of many people in this chamber and the Governor, Connecticut became the first state to pass the strongest set of campaign finance reforms through the legislative process. The Citizens' Election Fund has already endured dramatic sweeps of funding. This not the time to further reduce funding. Recent cuts include:

Public Act 08-1 transferred \$5,000,000 from the CEF
Public Act 09-1 transferred \$7,500,000 from the CEF
Public Act 09-2 transferred \$1,500,000 from the CEF
Public Act 09-3 transferred \$25,000,000 from the CEF (\$18,000,000 was transferred mid November 2009 and an additional sweep of \$7,000,000 will be made in Fiscal Year 11).

An additional twelve million dollars will not significantly help the state mitigation package, but it will effectively decimate the Citizens Election Program. We need this reform to continue in 2010. It can no longer withstand death by a thousand cuts.

The CEP cannot withstand further reductions. A proposed \$12 million will render the program useless for 2010 and future elections.

It is troubling that the state would consider eliminating this landmark program – a remarkable government reform that was put in place after years of corruption in Connecticut that earned us the name "Corrupticut". We cannot forget what brought us to the Citizens' Election Program.

Connecticut was rocked by scandal after scandal over the period from 1999 to 2005. Over that scandal-ridden period, the Governor, several of his aides, several of his friends and family, a State Treasurer, the Mayor of Bridgeport, a state contractor, and a State Senator either pled guilty or were convicted of corruption that involved illegal contributions or kickbacks to elected officials. Although each case was different, these were classic pay-to-play scandals that eroded public trust in state government.

The most damaging scandal and one of the largest in Connecticut's history involved Governor Rowland's illegal acceptance of gifts. The Rowland scandal began when the Governor lied to the media about the source of renovations to his lakefront cottage. When the media began to unearth the source of those renovations, Rowland admitted he lied and that he had illegally accepted gifts from friends, associates and state contractors to renovate his cottage in Litchfield county. Those friends gave him a hot tub, landscaping, a heating system and other amenities. Initially legislators and the media focused solely on the gifts, but Common Cause conducted research that showed that the roots of the scandal could be traced back to Rowland's campaign for Governor. One of our studies showed that the gift givers gave \$375,000 in campaign contributions to Rowland's campaigns – which was far more than the \$30,000 they gave in gifts. The other study detailed how the Tomassos, their families, subcontractors and others funneled nearly a half a million dollars to Rowland's reelection campaigns. Those donations, along with the well-known illegal gifts, helped forge a relationship with Rowland that led to the Tomassos and their companies securing three lucrative no-bid contracts worth \$100 million. Common Cause helped show that the corruption trail began on the campaign trail.

But the Governor and the General Assembly worked hard to restore the state's reputation by passing the first campaign finance system instituted by a state legislature. The inaugural year of the Citizen's Election Program was an unqualified success. Seventy-five percent of all candidates for Connecticut's General Assembly ran under the CEP. Nearly eighty percent, or 152 out of 187 of those elected to serve in the next General Assembly ran under the Clean Elections program. In the Connecticut Senate, 89 percent of the seats, or 32 of 36, will be held by Clean Elections officials. On the House side, Clean Elections officials will hold at least 120 of the 151 seats.

Connecticut cannot afford to slide back to pre-2005 days. We have come too far. In difficult financial times, we need this critical government reform in place to help ensure public confidence in our state government.

Common Cause in Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has more than 400,000 members around the country and 36 state chapters. We have approximately 7200 members and activists in Connecticut.

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